



Heavy Words Lightly Thrown: The Reason Behind the Rhyme

By Chris Roberts

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Was Little Jack Horner a squatter? "Baa Baa Black Sheep" a bleat about taxation? What did Jack and Jill *really* do on that hill? Chris Roberts reveals the seamy and quirky stories behind our favorite nursery rhymes.

Nursery rhymes are rarely as innocent as they seem—there is a wealth of concealed meaning in our familiar childhood verse. More than a century after Queen Victoria decided that children were better off without the full story, London librarian Chris Roberts brings the truth to light. He traces the origins of the subtle phrases and antiquated references, revealing religious hatred, political subversion, and sexual innuendo.

Roberts reveals that when Jack, nimble and quick, jumped over a candlestick, he was reenacting a popular sport that tested whether a person was lean and healthy. Humpty Dumpty was actually a cannon mounted on the walls of a church in Colchester, blown up during the English Civil War. Few know that the cockles in "Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary" actually refer to cuckolds in the promiscuous court of Mary Queen of Scots. Or that "Rub-a-dub-dub, three maids in a tub" was inspired by a fairground peepshow.

A fascinating history lesson that makes astonishing connections to contemporary popular culture, *Heavy Words Lightly Thrown* is for Anglophiles, parents, history buffs, and anyone who has ever wondered about the origins of rhymes. The book features a glossary of slang and historical terms, and spooky silhouettes of nursery-rhyme characters to accompany the rhymes. Mother Goose will never look the same again.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. A librarian by night and a London tour guide by day, Roberts deploys an informal style of scholarship to dazzling effect, transforming a catalogue of familiar nursery rhymes into a treasure trove of tantalizingly slippery archaisms, hidden etymological layers, arcane associations and buried meanings. Having explained how the Victorians sanitized nursery rhymes' traditionally earthy content, Roberts attends to each ditty separately, printing obscure variants and tracing historical references, from British constitutional history to bygone pagan customs. Unlocking the secret meanings of the past, Roberts also finds plenty of refreshingly straightforward modern-day analogies for the nursery rhymes—the chanted taunts of the average British soccer fan illustrate certain rhymes' original tone and purpose. In a fluidly digressive style, he debunks accepted theories and confidently asserts his own. His reading of "Hark, Hark, the Dogs Do Bark," for example, starts out by describing Elizabethan mass vagrancy, proceeds to anatomize 17th-century anti-Dutch sentiment and the etymology of the word "beggar," and winds up with a spirited commentary on New Age travelers. Roberts's intimate knowledge of London history is perfectly suited to his discussions of "London Bridge Is Falling Down" and "Pop Goes the Weasel." As any good historian of oral culture ought, Roberts intelligently admits that many rhymes have open-ended meanings subject to multiple interpretations. This is better than history lite—it's history made delightful. (Aug. 18)

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From the Back Cover

"An intriguing & informative historical trip through those odd little songs I sang as an odd little child. A must-have for anyone who has ever been younger than they are now."

--Angus Oblong, creator of "The Oblongs" animated series & author of *Creepy Susie: And 13 Other Tragic Tales for Troubled Children*

"A merry tour of the origins of favorite nursery rhymes--including wars, land grabs, religious persecution, red-light sex and worthless rulers. Chris Roberts shows that, for understanding our darker nature, Machiavelli's got nuthin' on Mother Goose."

--James Finn Garner, author of *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories*

About the Author

Chris Roberts is a librarian in South London and the proprietor of F and M Walking Tours in London. He incorporates these stories into his tours, which became the inspiration for the book. *Heavy Words Lightly Thrown* began as a self-published project in the UK and has already begun to receive widespread publicity, including coverage in *USA Today*. Roberts lived in New York City for several years after earning a degree in history at Swansea University. He lived in Berlin for a while before settling in London.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Tony Edwin:

Heavy Words Lightly Thrown: The Reason Behind the Rhyme can be one of your nice books that are good idea. We all recommend that straight away because this e-book has good vocabulary that could increase your

knowledge in vocabulary, easy to understand, bit entertaining however delivering the information. The article writer giving his/her effort to set every word into satisfaction arrangement in writing Heavy Words Lightly Thrown: The Reason Behind the Rhyme although doesn't forget the main place, giving the reader the hottest in addition to based confirm resource details that maybe you can be one among it. This great information could drawn you into fresh stage of crucial contemplating.

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